

9-1-1967

Overview of Pastoral Counseling

Leonhard C. Wuerffel

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wuerffel, Leonhard C. (1967) "Overview of Pastoral Counseling," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 38, Article 53.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol38/iss1/53>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Overview of Pastoral Counseling

LEONHARD C. WUERFFEL

In his editorial preface to a volume titled *An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, Wayne Oates makes the observation: "The pastor, regardless of his training, does not enjoy the privilege of electing whether or not he will counsel with his people. . . . His choice is not between counseling or not counseling, but between counseling in a disciplined and skilled way and counseling in an undisciplined and unskilled way."¹ Recent studies have also made it very clear that pastors hold a central and strategic position as counselors in today's society. Clinebell succinctly phrases the challenge: "It is obvious that clergymen are on the front lines in the struggle to lift the loads of troubled persons!"² Pastoral counseling

then is a vital part of the pastoral care task of every minister of the Gospel. It is an area in which continual growth is essential to understanding people and the development of meaningful skills in serving their needs.

The relationship between pastoral care and pastoral counseling is defined by Wise in words which at the same time define what pastoral counseling really ought to be:

Pastoral counseling should not be identified with pastoral care, but this is one of the many forms of pastoral care. Counseling is a process by which a person communicates to the pastor on the level of personal feelings in order to work out or resolve a personal problem. When the need for counseling is at an end, the deeper aspects of the relationship of the pastor and person are relinquished, since the pastor's responsibility is to help others resolve their dependence upon him and become responsible toward God. Just what this means concretely depends on the needs of each person. All pastoral counseling ought to involve pastoral care but not all pastoral care is carried on through counseling.³

Productive pastoral counseling does not necessarily call for the pastor to complement his theological preparation for this task by becoming a specialist in clinical psychology, psychiatry, or psychoanalysis. His unique task as the spiritual leader to the people of his immediate parish and the larger community is to be fully appreciated.

¹ Wayne E. Oates, *An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1959), p. vi.

² Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 43.

This article continues the series of presentations titled "Reading Programs in Theology" offered under the sponsorship of the Department of Continuing Education of Concordia Seminary. The series is designed to provide reading courses in various areas of theology, offering brief introductions to limited fields of theological study together with a recommended bibliography for further study by individuals or groups. Enrollees are entitled to purchase the books discussed in these articles at a discount price through the Seminary Store. For additional information interested persons may contact Prof. Robert Conrad, head of the Department of Continuing Education. A new course will appear each quarter. The accompanying study guide in the area of pastoral counseling was prepared by Leonhard C. Wuerffel, professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary.

³ Carroll A. Wise, *The Meaning of Pastoral Care* (New York, N. Y.: Harper, 1966), p. 67.

As a pastor he is to grow in knowledge and ability in this area as in all his many tasks as a dispenser of the Gospel and an "equipper" of people for service in the Lord's work. He joins forces with all legitimate healing disciplines in helping people. From these other specialties he can learn much about the dynamics of human personality and development. He can also gain helpful insights into the nature of man. His distinct contribution rests, however, on his calling as a minister of Jesus Christ and the degree to which his total ministry, including counseling, is anchored in Biblical roots.

Needless to say, as people come to the pastor for help or as he approaches people to serve them, he must know their needs, understand how they feel about themselves and the problem confronting them that demands decision. Each individual is to be respected as a person with "the right to tell his own story." Disciplined listening is an essential tool and is often called "the art of listening." Godin uses the term "welcome" for what is most commonly called "acceptance" by the counselor and shows the value of silence in this connection when he states in one of his footnotes:

Concerning the considerate silence and its value in psychological welcome, research has shown that inexperienced counselors talk three times as much as the counselee (300 words for every 100). But experienced counselors often manage to say less than a quarter of all the words spoken—and recorded—in the course of a conversation (25 words in every 100). Naturally, this is a question of the means employed. A point worth noting is that the counselors who say the least and ask the least number of precise questions are the ones who obtain the greatest quantity

of really important data on the problem in question in the same span of time. The counselee knows his real problem far better than the counselor; once welcomed and reassured, he will move rapidly toward it.⁴

In addition to developing the ability to listen (often a serious problem for the pastor who is chiefly prepared to speak, teach, evaluate, or direct), the pastor has the advantage of the following resources: (1) he is identified as a man of God as he helps people in plight; (2) he is a representative of a community of Christian people who gather around the means of grace to grow in their love, faith, and hope; (3) he is personally related in a strong bond of affection and trust to the troubled parishioner with whom he shares some of the deepest and most intimate aspects of human living; (4) he is expert in relating the Word and prayer to the concerns of people; (5) he is well grounded in the faith of God's grace and providential guidance of His people; (6) he is known to be dedicated to the eternal values that stretch beyond the immediate struggles of men.

Both pastor and parishioner are bound together in a common faith and gain strength through the healing fellowship of God's people. Both are aware that the troubled person is brought from plight to pilgrimage through no innate qualities or overt efforts of their own, but alone by the love of God, the grace as found in Jesus Christ, and the abiding fellowship of the Holy Spirit. As in pastoral care, so also in pastoral counseling this focus is the heart and core of the one-to-one or small-group relationship of this particular ministry to

⁴ Andre Godin, *The Pastor as Counselor* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), p. 158.

God's own. Essential to the pastoral counseling process is acceptance by the pastor, not necessarily approval but the earnest endeavor to understand without projecting judgment prematurely into the person's frame of reference. Here is the honest attempt "to walk in the skin" of another and his difficulties. Here is the need of steady growth in the skill to understand the person's difficulty as he sees it, and to bring help to him from within that person's own perspective. Here is the need to recognize as a working principle that a troubled person can seldom be helped without wanting that help, and that spiritual insight cannot be forced into unwilling hearts. Here is the challenge to the pastor to mediate through his actions and words the grace of Jesus Christ to the penitent sinner. Here is a drain on the emotional and spiritual life of the pastor which calls for regular and full communion with the Lord in Word and Sacrament. Here is the privilege of sharing with fellow pastors and church leaders the common task which they have in serving as sinners yet saints the many and varied needs of the saints yet sinners in their circle of relationships. Finally, here it must be true as a professional ethic that the pastor is pledged not to divulge *privileged communication* nor use personal information in a hurtful manner.

Reference has been made above to the need for all those engaged in the legitimate healing disciplines to communicate with one another for the sake of better understanding and growth. Postseminary clinical training is also on the increase in many church circles. Some preparation for this is being made by additions to seminary curricula throughout the nation. In addition, groups of professional men are reg-

ularly meeting to share and to penetrate in depth the several responsibilities they carry. The February 1967 issue of *Pastoral Psychology* carries a significant article in which this noteworthy statement is made: "Currently one of the fastest-growing methods of counselor training is that of the small group of clergy meeting regularly with a psychiatrist to discuss specific problems arising in the daily course of ministering."⁵ The article contains helpful insights into the value of this approach and is worth the time and attention of those pastors concerned with gaining "on-the-job training." This can result in giving wise and salutary direction to pastoral counseling and contribute to the pastor's own growth and comprehension of what is involved in his service to people. It can also aid the pastoral counselor in the art of referral when his efforts need to be complemented by medical services in meeting the highly complex and specialized demands of given types of burdened people. Finally, such group consultations keep the pastor in the parish ministry while he is growing in his ability to relate effectively to people and their problems and while he is gaining a better understanding of himself as a person with needs. In the human encounter of counseling there are always two sets of needs involved—those of the person coming for help and those of the person seeking to help. In short, as the responsible and alert Christian pastor has brought the Word of God to bear upon his own many and varied needs, he learns to do the same for others who come to him with their human needs. As pastors we always hold

⁵ John S. Jenkins and T. A. Waters, "The Pastor Learns the Art of Counseling," *Pastoral Psychology*, XVIII, 171 (February 1967), 22.

out hope for solution, not because of our human abilities but because of God. A person's relationship with God is the ultimate relationship wherein the most profound changes occur. Personal integration ultimately involves peace with God and acceptance of His forgiveness in Christ and the power of the new life. This is the supreme therapy. To get to the place in the person's life where the Word of God will heal is the real skill of pastoral therapy.

Pastors can also read in the field of pastoral counseling and share their findings in small-group activities. The recent text by Howard Clinebell is a case in point. In his book, *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*, he presents "A Revised Model for Pastoral Counseling" with a stress on establishing relationships in pastoral counseling and a method of preparing for counseling by a "Reality-Practice Session" section at the end of each chapter. The book covers the whole gamut of problems usually confronted by the pastoral counselor and suggests acceptable methodologies in meeting these many difficulties, both in one-to-one as well as small-group contacts.

Clinebell's book presents a good survey of what has happened and, in the judgment of many, must happen in the field of pastoral counseling.

The ministry of counseling has been flowering with steadily increasing vigor. The growing impact of clinical pastoral training, the strengthening of seminary education in counseling, the remarkable proliferation of church-related counseling programs, the emergence of pastoral counseling as a speciality within the ministry, the strengthening of seminary doctoral programs in counseling, the rise of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, the burgeoning literature in the

field, denominational counseling programs, and the current experimentation in the pastoral care ministry of the laity—these are some of the signs of the surging vitality. It is thrilling to realize that we are in a renaissance period in the church's age-old ministry to the burdened. The challenge to each of us is to be a *participant* and *contributor*, and not a mere observer, in this dynamic movement—a movement which provides fresh responses to the needs of those beside our modern Jericho roads, robbed of their self-esteem and beaten by the crises and tragedies of life.

If the pastoral counseling renaissance is to become the powerful force for renewal which it can become, certain decisive changes must occur. Pastoral counseling must come of age in both theory and practice. It must find a new level of self-identity and maturity, by deepening its theological roots, broadening its methodology, and discovering its unique contribution to the helping of troubled humanity, with reference to both its own heritage and the other helping disciplines. The minister as counselor needs a unique self-understanding of his image, role, functions, and goals. As a clergyman, his self-understanding obviously must have a theological base derived from his awareness of the grounding of what he does in the ongoing life, message, and tradition of the church. Major contributions have been made to this theological self-understanding in recent literature. The particular thrust of this book is toward broadening the methodology and enriching the model of pastoral counseling.

It is my conviction that pastoral counseling theory and practice are at a crossroads and must turn a corner if they are to respond to the opportunity for a renewal ministry of enlarged dimensions. If the

corner can be turned, a new chapter will begin in the church's ministry to the heavy-laden.⁶

I. SOME SUGGESTED BASIC TEXTS IN THE
GENERAL FIELD
OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

1. Clinebell, Howard J., Jr. *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1966.

This recently published text covers the field in theory and practice and aims at introducing the parish pastor and seminary student to a "revised model for pastoral counseling," which is basically "relationship-centered counseling." Together with the recommended casebook this text can be used with benefit by a group of pastors who wish to learn from one another. The casebook is that by Lewman S. Cryer and John M. Vayhinger, *Casebook in Pastoral Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962. The cases can be used in employing the "Reality-Practice Sessions" suggested for developing sensitivities in understanding people and their problems and growth in the skill of counseling. Highly recommended as a starter, an introduction to the whole field, and for the best and latest bibliographical material!

2. Faber, Heije, and Ebel vander Schoot. *The Art of Pastoral Conversation*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962.

As the term "conversation" would indicate, much stress is placed on the dynamics that are involved in the communication process with people, and the presentation of principles is coupled with helpful and elucidating case materials. Another good

book to introduce pastors to some of the better materials in the field of pastoral counseling, especially as developed on the European scene.

3. Godin, Andre. *The Pastor as Counselor*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965.

Written by a Jesuit priest who is also well trained in the field of psychiatry, this volume gives careful consideration to the contributions of all the healing disciplines, but especially aids the pastor to see his role clearly as he serves human need. He defines pastoral counseling as "a human dialogue undertaken and carried out in the name of God . . . : two human beings, whose salvation and spiritual progress depend upon their opening themselves to the grace of God." The footnotes of the book, containing excellent definitive and meaningful materials, are worth its price.

4. Hiltner, Seward. *The Counselor in Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1950.

Somewhat dated but still a valuable tool when the pastor considers his own attitudes and emotions as they are involved in the counseling process. A book which the beginning counselor can well use for years as a handy checklist on his own part in the counseling process.

5. Hiltner, Seward. *Pastoral Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1949.

One of the early classics in the field which contains a wealth of helpful material and represents the earliest approach (Rogerian or client-centered method) to pastoral counseling. The Lutheran pastor, as he considers his task as a pastoral counselor, will look for more use of the means

⁶ Clinebell, pp. 16—17.

of grace than this book contains. He will find a stress on methodology and many useful cases interspersed with the presentation.

6. Hulme, William E. *How To Start Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1955.

An elementary introduction to the field, but a helpful little volume as a check on what the pastor is doing or hopes to do for and with the people in his charge. Also valuable in uncovering those factors which motivate members of the parish to seek their pastor's help when the need for counseling arises.

7. Hulme, William E. *Counseling and Theology*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Muhlenberg Press, 1956.

This Lutheran professor's early effort is a valuable aid and defines pastoral counseling as "psychologically oriented *Seelsorge*." The aim of counseling is growth; accordingly, the pastoral counselor does not only seek to find a solution to the problem, but he remains concerned about the ongoing process of maturation so that the counselee is better able to handle future difficulties. He combines an insight-oriented approach to the counseling process with so-called "supportive counseling." The use of the means of grace is treated briefly but concisely in this basic text on pastoral counseling. Highly recommended as a basic book.

8. Johnson, Paul E. *Person and Counselor*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1967.

Written by a veteran in the field, this volume is Johnson's first attempt at a text on pastoral counseling. He presents "responsive counseling" not merely as a method or technique but as a way to draw together what he considers to be the best

found in all healing disciplines and reflects a deep and wholesome understanding of the human situation. The emphasis on person is applied both ways, to the pastor as he views his own person in the counseling process and to the counselee as viewed by the pastor — both essential to true help.

9. Meehl, Paul, et al. *What, Then, Is Man?* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.

This "Symposium of Theology, Psychology, and Psychiatry" should be in the library of every pastoral counselor and has specific significance for the Lutheran pastor in view of the meaningful material in particular areas, such as the means of grace, Biblical anthropology, and many other vital issues involved in the process of helping people.

10. Oates, Wayne E., et al. *An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1959.

The well-known editor of this combined effort of Baptist professors in pastoral care has stated: "We hope this book will be a road map for many a pilgrimage . . . into the area of pastoral care and counseling." The scope is comprehensive and the content helpful. It is particularly meaningful as a ready source for most aspects of the pastoral counseling task.

11. Wise, Carroll A. *Pastoral Counseling, Its Theory and Practice*. New York: Harper, 1951.

Written by one of the early pioneers in the modern pastoral counseling movement, this brief book presents a fairly complete consideration of the factors involved in the counseling process for a pastor. Theologically his case could be strengthened; how-

ever, the insights of a capable teacher and pastor are adequately reflected.

II. SOME TEXTS IN THE AREA OF MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Johnson, Dean. *Marriage Counseling: Theory and Practice*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961.

Klemer, Richard H., ed. *Counseling in Marital and Sexual Problems: A Physician's Handbook*. Baltimore: Williams-Wilkins, 1965.

Morris, Kenneth J. *Premarital Counseling*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960.

———. *Marriage Counseling*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Stewart, Charles W. *The Minister as Marriage Counselor*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1961.

In addition to much sound counseling theory, these texts will aid the pastor in achieving a better understanding of what is uniquely involved in the difficult field of marital conflict. The Klemer text, as indicated by the subtitle (*A Physician's Handbook*), will give the pastor as well as the medical man the very latest in research as well as the best in portraying the dimensions of stated problems. If you were picking one text, it is suggested that a start be made with Stewart's book. It is comprehensive and broad in its sweep of considerations.

III. SOME TEXTS DEALING WITH THE COUNSELING OF YOUTH

Hulme, William E. *God, Sex, and Youth*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1959.

Morris, C. Eugene. *Counseling with Young*

People. New York: Association Press, 1954.

The Youth Forum Series by Thomas Nelson & Sons, Camden, N. J., 1966.

Youth Asks, Why Bother About God? by Alvin N. Rogness.

Youth Considers "Do-It-Yourself" Religion, by Martin E. Marty.

Youth Considers Doubt and Frustration, by Paul L. Holmer.

Youth Considers Life Goals, by Ross Snyder.

Youth Considers Marriage, by David R. Mace.

Youth Considers Parents as People, by Randolph Crump Miller.

Youth Considers Personal Moods, by Reuel L. Howe.

Youth Considers Sex, by William E. Hulme.

Youth Considers the World of High School, by John S. Wood.

The Forum Series is a source of rich help in gaining a better understanding of young people and their approach to the issues of life. As in all such attempts, some are better than others, but all are helpful. Specific texts on this phase of working with youth are few and far between. Here the book in the Prentice-Hall series on *Successful Pastoral Counseling* is of specific worth though bibliographical material is missing: Bles, Robert A. *Counseling with Teenagers*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

IV. SOME TEXTS DEALING WITH THE COUNSELING OF THE BEHEAVED

Jackson, Edgar N. *Understanding Grief*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1953.

Westberg, Granger E. *Good Grief*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962.

This important field for pastoral counseling has not been served by many writings in book form but is receiving considerable thought and direction in periodical articles. Reference to these will be made at the end of this article.

V. SOME TEXTS DEALING WITH THE COUNSELING OF THE SICK

Cabot, Richard C., and Russell L. Dicks. *The Art of Ministering to the Sick*. New York: Macmillan, 1936.

Young, Richard K., and Albert L. Meiburg. *Spiritual Therapy*. New York: Harper, 1960.

The older of these two recommended readings still remains the classic in this field of counseling and remains the best introduction to every aspect of this ministry, while the more recent volume gives many excellent insights into the issues which form the subtitle to the book: *How the Physician, Psychiatrist and Minister Collaborate in Healing*. Appended to each chapter in this latter volume are many reputable recommendations "for further reading."

VI. SOME TEXTS DEALING WITH COUNSELING IN THE AREA OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Ellis, Albert. *How to Live with a Neurotic*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1957.

Gurin, Gerald, et al. *Americans View Their Mental Health*. New York: Basic Books, 1960.

Hofmann, Hans. *Religion and Mental Health*. New York: Harper, 1961.

Horneg, Karen. *Neurosis and Human Growth*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1950.

McCann, Richard V. *The Churches and Mental Health*. New York: Basic Books, 1962.

Oates, Wayne E. *Religious Factors in Mental Illness*. New York: Association Press, 1955.

Oates, Wayne E., et al. *The Minister's Own Mental Health*. New York: Channel Press, 1961.

Southard, Samuel. *The Family and Mental Illness*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957.

Tournier, Paul. *A Doctor's Casebook in the Light of the Bible*. New York: Harper, 1960.

———. *Guilt and Grace*. New York: Harper, 1962.

———. *The Strong and The Weak*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963.

———. *The Whole Person in a Broken World*. New York: Harper, 1964.

This list includes some of the more valuable books in this field of pressing need. The suggestion is in place that special attention be given to the works of Tournier. In addition to these recommended readings, a good book on abnormal psychology should be read and be kept at hand for easy and quick reference, such as: Coleman, James C. *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*. New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1950.

VII. SOME TEXTS DEALING WITH THE COUNSELING OF ALCOHOLICS

Bier, William C., et al. *Problems in Addiction: Alcohol and Drug Addiction*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1962.

Clinebell, Howard J., Jr. *Understanding and Counseling the Alcoholic*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1956.

Durm, Jerry G. *God Is for the Alcoholic*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1965.

Ford, John C. *Man Takes a Drink*. New York: Kennedy & Sons, 1955.

Whitney, Elizabeth D. *The Lonely Sickness*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1965.

Clinebell's book still rates the best in this field of human suffering and should be in every pastor's library also as a ready reference for sources of help. Ford's smaller volume helps to gain insight to the dimensions of this problem. The remaining references vary in value.

VIII. SERIES OF TEXTS COVERING VARIOUS ASPECTS OF PASTORAL COUNSELING

Deserving of special mention is the series of texts published by Prentice-Hall under the general title *Successful Pastoral Counseling Series*. Many of the titles in this series are also appearing in paperback as Fortress Press productions. Of this series we would recommend:

Counseling the Childless Couple, by William T. Bassett.

Counseling with College Students, by Charles E. Kemp.

Counseling the Serviceman and His Family, by Thomas A. Harris.

Counseling the Unwed Mother, by Helen E. Terkelsen.

Depth Perspectives in Pastoral Work, by Thomas W. Klink.

Group Counseling, by Joseph W. Knowles.

Family Pastoral Care, by Russell J. Becker.

Helping the Alcoholic and His Family, by Thomas J. Shipp.

Helping Youth in Conflict, by Francis I. Frellick.

Marital Counseling, by R. Lefton Hudson.

Ministering to Deeply Troubled People, by Ernest E. Bender.

Ministering to the Dying, by Carl J. Scherzer.

Ministering to the Grief Sufferer, by C. Charles Bachmann.

Ministering to the Physically Sick, by Carl J. Scherzer.

Premarital Guidance, by Russell L. Dicks.

IX. PERIODICALS DEVOTED TO PASTORAL COUNSELING

Two periodicals worth reading regularly:

The Journal of Pastoral Care, published by Council for Clinical Training, Inc., 1312 Eye Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Pastoral Psychology, published by Meredith Publishing Co., Manhasset, N. Y.

X. NEW DIRECTIONS IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

We may conclude with a brief allusion to new developments in pastoral counseling indicated in this quotation from Clinebell's book on *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*, p. 22:

The new thrusts which have the most direct relevance to the theory and practice of pastoral counseling are these: *Role-relationship marriage counseling*, *family group therapy* (John E. Bell and Virginia M. Satir), *transactional analysis* (Eric Berne), *crisis intervention theory* (Gerald Caplan), *reality therapy* (William Glasser), *existential psychotherapy* (Rollo May, Viktor Frankl, J. F. T. Bugental), and the broad thrust of *ego psychology*. All these are rich sources of insights and tools for the counseling pastor.

St. Louis, Mo.